

Documents on Diplomacy: The Source

An Uprising Against Foreigners *Edwin Conger to Secretary of State Hay, Pekin, China, December 7, 1899*

SIR: I regret to report a very critical state of affairs among the missionaries and their converts in certain parts of Shantung. The season has been a poor one—crops have failed on account of the drought; great poverty and want prevail. An unusual amount of looting is a result, and naturally the foreigners or their followers come in for the larger share of grief.

Early in October last a secret society called “Boxers,” in the neighborhood of Ch’ih Ping, assembled with the avowed purpose of driving out foreigners and of extirpating Christians, but, upon aid being requested by the missionaries, soldiers were sent and, on October 18, a conflict ensued which resulted in the killing of some fifty or more of the Boxers and in dispersing them.

The trouble then seemed to be over, but unfortunately a number of citizens of the village where the affair occurred were killed or wounded, in consequence of which the governor arrested the officer commanding the troops and memorialized the Throne for his impeachment, because, the governor says, of the mistake in killing others than the Boxers.

This action of the governor encouraged the Boxers, and they have since rallied again and are doing much damage to the Christian converts, extorting money from them, threatening the missions, and giving ample cause for serious alarm.

I have, by repeated notes and visits to the *Tsungli Yamen* [Chinese Foreign Ministry], made strenuous demands for the suppressing of the rioters and the protection of these people. They reply that they have given peremptory orders to the governor, and

that he is doing all he can to disperse the brigands and protect the people. Copies of telegrams and correspondence enclosed will show what has been done.

The German Catholic missionaries had serious trouble in the province during last summer, but the German minister informs me that he has no late complaints.

The French minister is in receipt of most alarming news from the Italian missionaries in Shantung, who are under his charge, reporting robberies, burning of dwellings, and even death of converts.

It is generally understood that the governor, Yu-Hsien, is strongly antiforeign, and believed that he is by no means doing what he could and should do.

As you will see from my note to the *Tsungli Yamen*, I have, without demanding it, suggested the necessity and propriety of his removal, and I am glad to report that yesterday General Yuan Shih-kai, of the imperial guard, was appointed acting governor. He is an able, brave, courageous man, has mingled much with foreigners, and it is believed that, if the right kind of orders are given him from the Throne, the rioting will be stopped and order restored.

We hope so.

I have the honor to be, etc.,

E. H. CONGER

Source

United States Department of State, Papers Relating to Foreign Affairs, 1899